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KUNSTKAMMER OBJECTS IN MUSEUMS OF INDUSTRIAL ARTS: BANISHMENT OR USEFUL DESTINATION?

Lieske Tibbe

Summary

The point of departure for this essay is the current literature on nineteenth-century Museums of Industrial Arts (later referred to as Museums of Applied Arts). Usually it begins with the 1851 World Fair in London followed by the foundation of the South Kensington Museum, a catalyst that inspired many European nations to create museums promoting their own national industries and handicrafts. In the historiography of these museums, it will be found that older and different forms of exhibiting applied art are usually neglected, or dealt with in a negative manner. The nineteenth century use of pejorative terms will be analyzed. These relate to these older cabinets, as well as to cultural-historical collections presented in a 'picturesque' setting. In this connection, the views of Marius Vachon, who visited Museums of Industrial Arts throughout Europe, will be crucial.

As examples, I shall move back and forth between the Prussian Brandenburg *Kunstammer* and the Dutch Royal Cabinet of Curiosities. Many aspects of the vicissitudes of the remaining parts of both former *Kunstammer* collections are comparable – in Berlin as well as in Holland they were transferred several times, and every transition meant a reorientation. To conclude, the shifts in meaning of collections and objects will be related to feelings of national identity and international competition.

Progress versus Lumber

In the founding study by Barbara Mundt, *Die deutschen Kunstgewerbemuseen im 19. Jahrhundert*, published some 35 years ago, the *Deutsches Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe* in Berlin, founded in 1867, is described as one of the first examples. In Mundt's description of the

expansion of this initially very modest collection, a specific passage attracted my attention. She mentions the acquisition of the Royal Cabinet (*Königliche Kunstammer*), handed over by Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1875, as being of great importance for the museum. At the time, the *Kunstammer* collection was on show at the Neues Museum. Mundt writes:

Er übergab ihm [= the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, LT] in diesen Jahre 6500 kunstgewerbliche Objekte der königlichen Kunstammer (...), um ihnen einen sinnvolleren Platz zu geben als in der bisherigen, einer Verbannung gleichkommenden Aufstellung im obersten Stockwerk des Königlichen Museums.¹

In the nineteenth century, the Royal Cabinet was described in similar terms, for instance in the 1881 *Festschrift* at the inauguration of the new building of the *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe*. Recalling the situation of the *Kunstammer* in the *Neues Museum*, the author wrote:

Was sich hier in drei Sälen und zwei kleinen Nebenräumen zusammenfand, war sehr weit davon entfernt, ein einheitliches Ganzes zu bilden. Es war eben der Restbestand alles dessen, was noch nicht zu selbständigen organischen Sammlungen ausgebildet war. Der Ballast zufällig zusammengetragenen Raritäten lag erdrückend auf den wirklich werthvollen, zum Teil mit den erlesensten Schätzen versehenen Gruppen der Sammlung.²

1 Mundt 1974, 43. The *Neue Museum* together with the *Alte Museum* were also called *Königliches Museum* (Royal Museum).

2 Kunstgewerbe-Museum 1881/1981, 26. On that occasion the institution was renamed *Königliches Kunstgewerbemuseum*. See also Barbara Segelken's contribution in this volume.

Mundt's terminology of *Verbannung* (banishment) and *sinnvolleren Platz* (a more useful destination) is related to the nineteenth-century pejoratives *Ballast* (lumber) and *Raritäten* (curiosities). The image of neglected or forgotten collections in old cabinets, needing to be rescued by incorporation in modern museums of decorative art, is a central assumption in many nineteenth-century publications on museums of applied or decorative art. Their frame of reference is a line of development starting from the 1851 World Fair in London, where many countries exhibiting the products of their national industries were forced to face up to their shortcomings. On the other hand, critics complained of the ugliness and tastelessness of objects produced on a large scale in the technologically advanced countries. Anxiety for international competition as well as concern for the moral standard of the population – which was thought to be related to the quality of its handicraft and industry – inspired governments and civil organizations to attempt to enhance the aesthetic level of industrial products. Great Britain, the leading industrial nation at the time, was also the first to set up an educational system to fight against the supposed ugliness. The South Kensington system was based on the idea of nationwide interconnected drawing schools and museums of industrial art, and the heart of this system was the South Kensington School of Design and its museum, the present Victoria & Albert Museum. Completed at the time of the second World Fair in 1862, the South Kensington Museum and School were visited by many admirers from overseas, who propagated and eventually copied the system in their own countries. The first 'copy' was the Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie in Vienna (1864), while the next one was the abovementioned museum in Berlin (1868).³ The terminology used to describe these new museums is one of resurrection after decline, of life and progress after stagnation or death.

3 Cf. Conforti 1998, 23-47, and Trippi 1998, 79-88. See also Schwabe 1866.

Earlier collections assembled to enhance the level of handicraft and industry by visual examples – some modest examples existed as early as around 1800 – are mostly dealt with as preliminary to the development that began in 1851. Other kinds of collections, such as the still extant cabinets of curiosities or cultural-historical collections, were either overlooked or described in disparaging terms, however excellent their content. Even in the case of period rooms, this approach to exhibiting objects was seen as 'cluttered' and 'disorganized' and consequently of little use.

However, in the last 35 years many studies on these older cabinets and their collections have been published; in fact one could say that specialisation is flourishing within art-historical and cultural-historical research. The image presented in those studies is not at all one of mustiness and dust – on the contrary, even in the nineteenth century when they were past their peak, cabinets were still attractive to the general public.⁴ Often specific parts of their collections (as for instance coins, gems, Greek and Roman sculpture) were transferred to new national museums, but as long as the cabinets existed new objects were acquired by purchase or donation.

In this article, the transformations of the Prussian Brandenburg *Kunstammer* and the Dutch Royal Cabinet of Curiosities during the nineteenth century will serve as examples. The vicissitudes experienced by the two cabinets are comparable, as they were both re-installed after the Napoleonic lootings and the remains of the eighteenth-century cabinets were amply supplied by new acquisitions,⁵ until eventually the original eighteenth-century royal collections ended up forming only a small part of the cabinets. In the course of the century both collections were moved several times and their con-

4 See for instance: Hildebrand/Theuerkauff 1981; Van Wezel 2003a, 204-208; Röber 2001. For the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague see: Lunsingh Scheurleer 1946 and 1956; Van der Ham 2000, 64-68, 88-96; Effert 2003.

5 Dreier 1981, 36.

tents drastically reduced; by the 1870s however the residue of both was still substantial.

The cabinets were also dissolved at roughly the same time. The Berlin collection, as mentioned before, was transferred to the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in 1875. The Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in The Hague, after its re-organization into the Netherlands Museum of History and Art in 1876, was finally liquidated when this museum was moved to Amsterdam. This process of splitting up was a long-drawn out one, lasting from 1883 till 1888.

Dead and inactive museums

In 1881, the *Königliches Kunstgewerbemuseum* (recently moved to its new housing, the present *Gropiusbau*), was visited by the Frenchman Marius Vachon (1850 – 1928), an art critic and author of several publications on art, architecture and the applied arts. His report (fig. 1) was mainly concerned with the organization of the museum, with the content being largely treated as secondary, although he did mention the pieces of furniture (*sans grande valeur artistique*), the large quantity of textiles, and the *Lüneberger Ratssilber*, acquired in 1874. Neither does he refer to the former *Königliche Kunstkammer*, though the number of objects in the museum that originated from this collection was considerable. Probably this omission had to do with his republican convictions, as what pleased him most was the idea of this museum being a ‘mixed institution’, state-supported but initiated and directed by the Berlin *Gewerbeverein*, a civilian institution which in his opinion was necessary for decisiveness and flexibility. Vachon made an unfavourable comparison between the Berlin museum and the Bavarian National Museum in München, a state institution and in his view a very passive kind of museum, ‘This is really a museum in the strict sense of the term, *telle que les musées du Louvre, de Cluny et du Luxembourg*’.⁶ Two years later (1883) Vachon, commissioned by the French government,



Fig. 1 First page of Vachon's article 'Le Musée des arts industriels à Berlin', in *Gazette des beaux-arts* 1883, with example of an 'altdeutsche' chair

published an extensive report on museums and other educational institutes of industry and art in Germany, the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, Italy and Russia – the first volume in a series of such reports on industrial education throughout Europe. Once again the Berlin museum was highly praised, especially for its systematic presentation in most rooms, with chronological sequences of objects, some classified according to materials, others according to their function. As for the Bavarian National Museum, he seems to have revised his opinion. Having been reorganized, the museum looked orderly and its objects were displayed in a functional and logical manner. Thus, the museum was no longer, a *musée de curiosités, d'objets d'art dans le genre du Musée de Cluny*.⁷

Vachon seems to have disapproved of the Louvre, and, even more so, of the Cluny Museum, viewing them as museums of decorative art. In

6 Vachon 1883.

7 Vachon 1885, 12-15, 87-92 and 109-113.

his opinion, collections of beautiful old objects just exposed as such, could only arouse 'retrospective sentiments'.⁸ In Budapest, Stockholm, and in his own country at Toulouse, Angers, Nantes and Lille, he found museums or collections he disqualified as *un petit Cluny* or *Cluny en miniature*: picturesque, but retrospective and so only existing for the sake of curiosity and bookishness, *sans autre objectif que celui de la curiosité pure et simple*.⁹

To Vachon, 'Cluny' seems to have been a byword for disorder and even slovenliness, though he also labels it as 'picturesque'. In an article in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts* he complains of the shortage of space leading to overcrowded rooms and corridors containing objects of great value, which were overlooked as a result.¹⁰ It is remarkable that he paid no attention to the museum's very evocative 'period rooms', such as the famous *Chambre du François 1er*, arranged by the founder of the museum Alexandre du Sommerard, elaborating on the tradition of Alexandre Lenoir's *Musée des monumens français*.¹¹ Du Sommerard's son and successor, Edmond du Sommerard, justified this kind of presentation in his catalogue, saying that in former times there existed a distinct, intimate connection between architecture, decoration and furnishing of a building. This lost connection could be reconstructed by exhibiting complete interiors within a suitable architectural setting.¹² In 1883 when Du Sommerard wrote these words, exhibiting by way of 'period rooms' or 'period units' was becoming more common in museums of decorative art, including some of those visited by Vachon. However, he preferred either to ignore them or dismiss them with notes like '(...) this museum is neither a *Cluny*, nor a museum of decorative art (...)' (Report on Edinburgh).¹³ In

his report on Denmark for instance, he hardly mentions the museum in Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen, where the layout was very evocative of a *Kunstammer*, simply remarking that the Louvre and Cluny might envy its precious contents.¹⁴ If he had visited the Brandenburg *Kunstammer* before 1875, when it was still housed in the *Neue Museum*, he surely would have called it a *Cluny en miniature*, due to as well as the lack of systematic presentation, as its showing of religious art in an appropriately Gothic *Sternensaal*.¹⁵

After all his explorations in European countries, Vachon concluded in his final report that organizers and directors of *real* museums of industrial art were not at all interested in collections of history and scholarship (*collections historiques et d'érudition*), which only satisfied the needs of art-lovers (*amateurs*), collectors, and writers of academic studies. What those directors of real museums sought were singular objects, outstanding examples of taste, elegance and perfect craftsmanship, or others that were valuable in a technical sense, as examples of manufacturing processes.¹⁶ But to whom were the Louvre and the Cluny Museum of any interest? In his view their only public would have been the *promeneurs* ('idle strollers') and *amateurs*, desiring to embellish their ignorance with hazy erudition, and archeologists, ambitious to write academic treatises, or merchants of second-hand objects, always eager to learn a new sales trick or two. And who were the visitors of the sleepy *Musée de Céramique de Sèvres*? Apparently it was patronised by foreigners, tourists and Parisians strolling in the park of Saint Cloud. According to Vachon, a really active, effective museum of industrial art should have a comprehensible classification system, preferably according to material or technique and the Berlin Kunstgewerbemuseum satisfied his demands in many ways. 'Everything is functional, com-

8 Vachon 1885, 93.

9 Vachon 1885, 35 (Budapest); Vachon 1888b, 67-68 (Stockholm); Vachon 1897, 162-163, 243, 257, 332-333 (French towns).

10 Vachon 1877.

11 See amongst others. Bann 1984, 77-92.

12 Du Sommerard 1883, XVIII.

13 Vachon 1890, 187.

14 Vachon 1888b, 36. See for the layout in Rosenborg: Gundestrup 1985.

15 Röber 2001, 96-99.

16 Vachon 1894, 13.



Fig. 2 Back cover of the French edition of the *Guide to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities* (Guide n.d.), showing the *Mauritshuis* where the collection was housed, Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

bined and arranged with a view to the development of the industrial arts in Germany. The collections were mainly confined to objects fit to serve the artistic and technical instruction of artists, industrialists and craftsmen, while bookishness and curiosity are rigorously expelled'.¹⁷

In Holland, similar rhetoric circulated concerning the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities (fig. 2). Around 1860 the state of this Cabinet was the subject of public and even parliamentary discussions. Objects suffered neglect and were kept in a disorderly fashion in small rooms. The catalogue hardly deserved to be called such. Although the cabinet was visited frequently, it was said that the public was only after some sort of fair-ground attraction. From various quarters it was urged that the collection desperately needed

reorganizing as a new museum, equipped in accordance with modern principles, comparable to the South Kensington Museum.¹⁸ In 1873, the lawyer and art connoisseur Victor de Stuers, published a renowned essay called *Holland op zijn smalst* (Holland at its narrowest), criticizing the Dutch authorities for their lack of care of the national cultural heritage, including the public collections. The Royal Cabinet of Curiosities did not escape his criticism:

How that pawnshop is looking, left (...) to decay, being an object of derision for every foreigner. (...) If God had ordered Noah to gather two objects of any possible nature, without giving him time to order their arrangement, I think this would have resulted in a pile of junk (...) looking like this collection. If one were permitted to carry out an excavation, one would find, alongside splendid pieces of embossed metalwork, of

17 Vachon 1899, 131-133 en 201-203. Cf. Du Sommerard 1883, XX. According to Du Sommerard the – ever increasing – public of the Musée de Cluny was primarily composed of *d'artisans et de travailleurs*.

18 Lunsingh Scheurleer 1956, 291-298; Van der Ham 2000, 110-115; Effert 2003, 59-62.

enamels, of ceramic art, or delightful Chinese and Japanese porcelains and fabrics, a large quantity of peculiar but out-of-place fig leaves, belonging to New Caledonian ladies, and other little odds and ends of various provenance, which arrived here nobody knows how – waxen flowers, cut-out dolls, the Lord's Prayer in fifty copies engraved on a ten-cent piece, and other such fine things!.¹⁹

A significant incentive to de Stuers to write his 'Holland at its narrowest' had been the export of an important piece of Dutch art, the seventeenth-century rood screen of the cathedral of Saint John at 's-Hertogenbosch that had been acquired by the South Kensington Museum.²⁰ Indignation over the loss of a national monument as well as admiration for the London museum inspired him to propose the founding of a Netherlands Museum of History and Art with a view to stimulating the industry of the nation. In 1866 he wrote a report on the British system of education in the arts and crafts, *Rapport over de teekenscholen in Engeland*, in which he attributed the flourishing of the English ceramic industry directly to the influence of South Kensington.²¹ In 1875 Victor de Stuers was appointed as Head of the Department of Arts and Sciences at the Ministry of the Interior, an appropriate position for an advocate of a Netherlands Museum of History and Art. In 1875 this museum, incorporating parts of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities, opened its doors in The Hague and its first director was David van der Kellen Jr., whom we shall meet again at a later stage.

19 De Stuers 1873, 344-346.

20 Victor 1975, 23-24. See for the acquisition of this choir screen by the South Kensington Museum: Wainwright 2002, 167-168.

21 De Stuers/Salverda 1880. Three years later, the Royal Antiquarian Society (Koninklijk Oudheidkundig Genootschap) published the report, *Een museum van kunst voor de nijverheid* (A Museum of Art for Industry; Franken 1869), also with references to the South Kensington Museum. The Royal Antiquarian Society was a civil association of prominent private persons, which had been collecting remarkable objects and providing financial funding for a new national museum from 1858 onwards. See Heijbroek 1995, 13-14.

Looking backward or forward

So what was the real meaning of terms such as 'lumber rooms', 'retrospective', 'deathly' or 'for curiosity only'? Vachon's reproach that the Cluny Museum was only of interest to amateurs, collectors and holiday-makers, was related to contemporary practices of collecting. In particular the collecting of medieval art – medieval and early Renaissance art were specialities of this museum – had its origins in the romantic fascination with the Middle Ages in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Wealthy private collectors set about transforming their homes and interiors in picturesque medieval fashion, mixing objects and furniture in an eclectic way. The director of the Cluny Museum, Alexandre du Sommerard had been a passionate collector himself, and his display in the museum in the 1830s was directly related to the abundance of such private collectors of colourful and romantic interiors. This display of 'period rooms' at the Cluny Museum was intended to revive the 'atmosphere' of the Middle Ages, with architecture, furniture and other objects combining to suggest an organic whole where each object was in harmony with the entire setting. Thus the museum functioned as a romantic refuge for the visitor.²²

Ideologically, this manner of museum display is linked to romantic nationalism, a cultural-historical and nationalist view of history as a reaction to the Enlightenment and the Revolution. This approach implied a quest for a homogeneous community of people, rooted in a region or nation. The past was idealized and imagined as more or less static, with fractions, schisms and changes being conveniently forgotten. In *Metahistory*, Hayden White's study of how the nineteenth century tackled the writing of history, this vision is labelled 'organicism' and based on the idea of a central principle or essential meaning guiding all individual phenomenon. Most often it was related to a conservative

22 Bann 1984, 79-92, and Emery/Morowitz 2004, 287-290. For the collecting of medieval art in the Netherlands see Kruijsen 2002.

world-view that accorded with its view of the past. White noted that professional historians dismissed this organicistic vision as speculative and unscholarly²³, indeed one that was suited to writers of historical romance, collectors and other *amateurs*.

Directly opposed to this was the concept of 'active' museums of industrial art, where historical connections were torn apart to show separate developments in individual sections of industry. To a leather worker, a technical knowledge of pottery manufacture was of no use, any more than a stone-cutter could learn anything by looking at textiles. Sometimes the tearing apart was drastic, with textiles being cut into pieces, architectural fragments heaped into job lots and the separate pieces scattered around various museums.²⁴ The gaps which were left in the collections of authentic pieces, were filled by plaster casts or copies, quite the opposite of Cluny's unified cultural-historical presentations. In the museum of art and industry, the object was individualized, particularized and separated from history in order to serve progress. From this utilitarian point of view, a picturesque and evocative arrangement did indeed stand for conservatism and stagnation.

Shifts in meaning

The topic of particularization of the object leads directly to a consideration of shifts in the meaning of an object, when the context of presentation has changed. Here mention should be made of the philosopher Krysztof Pomian, and his defining of objects in collections as *sémio-phores*, objects that have lost their practical value – or that at any rate are no longer used – but to which a special significance is attributed. They have a reference to something invisible, to

their former owners, to former times, or to the divine. That invisible something in the background, is the source of the public's fascination with those objects.²⁵

In the case where the underlying concept, the unifying principle of a collection loses its impact, this does not mean that the objects become meaningless. Collections are broken up and objects are transferred to other kinds of collections and acquire new meanings in new relationships to other objects.²⁶ Seen in this light, it is worth examining the successive meanings attached to the objects in the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunst-kammer* and the Dutch Royal Cabinet of Curiosities in the nineteenth century. When these cabinets were reinstalled after the Napoleonic period, it would appear that memories of pre-revolutionary times were still a determining factor and the concept underlying eighteenth-century cabinet collections had not entirely vanished. This concept visualised the universe as a 'Great Chain of Being', a static world-view within which in essence every phenomenon could be reduced to a specific position, and within which everything was worthy of admiration and study as part of God's creation.²⁷ At the beginning of the century, this principle seems to have prevailed both in Berlin and The Hague, as the purchasing policy of both cabinets was similarly diverse, with private collections being acquired that had been compiled for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, in both cases during the first half of the century, specimens of naturalia, paintings and Classical sculpture, followed by exotic objects, were separated from the cabinets and became independent collections. The remnants of the 'mother' collections however were still multiform in character and as mentioned above, the Dutch Royal Cabinet of Curiosities was criticized in the 1870s by De

23 White 1973, 15-16, 25-26, 95.

24 As for instance a pair of Italian fifteenth-century candlesticks, acquired in 1828 by the *Kunst-kammer*, one of which was exchanged with the Amsterdam art dealer Rosenberg for objects belonging to the *Welfenschatz*, and which is now in the *Rijksmuseum* at Amsterdam, see the catalogue Leeuwenberg/Halsema-Kubes 1973, 374 (no. 629).

25 Pomian 1987, 12-20, and Pomian 2003, 7-15.

26 Pomian has demonstrated such shifts in meaning in his study, 'À propos des vases des Médicis' (in: Pomian 2003, 147-161), in which he followed the vicissitudes of a set of precious antique vases through the ages.

27 Lovejoy 1950, 144-145, 183-186, 242-245.



Fig. 3 First page of the *Guide to the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities* (Van de Kastelee n.d.), Photo: Rijksmuseum Amsterdam

Stuers, for its large quantity of 'silly' objects.²⁸ In the 1824 *Guide* (*Handleiding*) to this cabinet (fig. 3) the contents of the collection are specified as modelled, cut, and otherwise made sculpture, artefacts of wood, ivory, mother-of-pearl, tortoise-shell, polished stones, porcelain, fine ceramics, crystal, glass, masterpieces in gold and silver, brassware, multicoloured lacquer-work, laboratory instruments, musical instruments, furniture, utensils, vessels, articles of use, jewellery, costume and items of adornment for men and women, calligraphy, inks, pens, sheets of paper, manuscripts and books, plans and maps, paperworks, drawings and paintings, tools, coins, arms, and 'all kinds of amusing and rare things'.²⁹ Apparently at the time, the cru-

cial factors that lent meaning to the artefacts were their rarity, their capacity to amaze or that they came from distant continents.

Between the 1820s and 1860s the two cabinets showed distinct differences in their approach to collecting objects of interest. The Berlin *Kunstammer* supplemented its collection with objects of artistic value (*Kunsthandwerk*) and gradually disposed of its ethnographic and exotic objects, until finally in 1844 the ethnographic collection was catalogued as an independent collection.³⁰ In the meantime, the Dutch cabinet acquired three extensive collections of Japanese objects.³¹

A new phase in the existence of both cabinets occurred at the time of their rehousing. In Berlin in 1858 the cabinet moved from the *Stadtschloss* to the *Neue Museum*, and that in The Hague in 1875/76 went from the *Mauritshuis* to the nearby Netherlands Museum of History and Art. These transfers were marked by a conceptual transition in the policy of collecting, towards one that was more based on cultural history. To some degree, the colourful content of the cabinets lent itself to the presentation of such a view of history; a variety of remarkable objects had to be integrated into an ensemble suggesting an atmosphere of past times. But, also in accordance with the concept of cultural history, the accent gradually shifted from admiration for the wonders of the universe towards national history and identity.³²

The result of this shift was evident in the 1871 catalogue of the Berlin collection, showing a systematic classification of objects – as the curator Ledebur explained, in order to express the original but now invisible character of the collection, being cramped for space in small rooms.³³

30 Röber 2001, 15; see also Van Wezel 2001, 188-190.

31 Effert 2003, 192-211.

32 Röber 2001, 3-31, Van Wezel 2001, 188-190, Effert 2003, 43-49 and 64-159, 200-206.

33 Ledebur 1871, 4. According to Ledebur, the catalogue was classified *gruppenweise in chronologischer Reihenfolge*: The chronological order was *not* related to the arrangement of the original *Kunstammer*.

28 Van de Kastelee 1824 and Van de Kastelee n.d.

29 Van de Kastelee 1824, VII. See also the article of Rudolf Effert in this volume.

In the 1880s, director David van der Kellen Jr. used the opportunity of the 'Retrospective Exhibition' – intended as an annex of the 1883 International Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam – to transfer a part of his Netherlands Museum of History and Art from The Hague to Amsterdam. This Retrospective Exhibition consisting of Dutch antiquities, was set up in the almost completed building of the Rijksmuseum, and its display was in 'picturesque' style with a series of 'period rooms'.³⁴

It was intended that those objects should remain in the *Rijksmuseum* after the exhibition closed. In The Hague however a home had not yet been found for other parts of the Royal Cabinet of Curiosities. The archives of the *Rijksmuseum* contain inventories that note the intended destination of the various objects. In the years 1883 to 1885, they were divided among several national museums in Leiden, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Museum of Geology and Mineralogy, the Herbarium, the National Museum of Antiquities and the National Ethnographic Museum (founded in 1880), in The Hague the Royal Cabinet of Coins and of course the new *Rijksmuseum* in Amsterdam.³⁵ The inventories really are a *mer à boire*; otherwise they might have given an interesting insight into the disciplinary demarcations of the time. For instance, in the removal list of the Netherlands Museum the objects are accurately described and measured, but the institutions to which they were dispatched are not mentioned. A striking feature is the division of exotic objects into ethnographical objects and aesthetically valuable artefacts, both to be divided between the National Ethnographic Museum in Leiden and the Netherlands Museum of History and Art.³⁶ A draft inventory of the objects sent from

The Hague to Amsterdam gives some information about what reached the new museum. It includes objects in the exotic category such as blue and coloured chinaware, lacquerwork, soapstone, ivory and enamels, Chinese glass, silver, bronze and sculpture. According to the descriptions, most objects were abundantly decorated. Annotations to numbers in the inventory indicate that some objects were redirected to the Leiden museum: a grey earthenware bowl with only a few incisions, simple lacquer-work bins, incense burners, a tea set with mother-of-pearl decorations on a black ground (damaged) and twelve ivory balls, hanging on red silken strings.³⁷ The list of receipts of the National Ethnographic Museum proves that several of the removal lists do not match. Not until 1888 and only after many negotiations was the division of objects originating from the previous Royal Cabinet settled by contract.³⁸

What one can deduce from the records is the distinction that was made between 'objects of interest to industry and art' and 'ethnographical objects'. Simple objects were categorized as 'ethnographic', and ornamented pieces made of precious materials, as 'art'.³⁹ The records do not mention any explicit criteria for distribution, but most probably the decisive factor was the idea that the Netherlands Museum of History and Art should serve as a force for the improvement of the industrial arts. In fact, on occasion it is actually referred to as an 'industrial museum'. The nineteenth-century view was that handicraft and industry could be advanced by the applica-

34 See for this exhibition, Tibbe 2000, 143-148, and Tibbe 2003, 271-273.

35 Haarlem, Rijksarchief Noord-Holland, Archief 476 (Rijksmuseum; abbreviated = RMA) nr. 1076 (Splitting van het Kon. Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, 1883/1888).

36 Not before the 1980s, and by careful comparison of objects and archives, did it become clear what actually arrived at the Ethnographic Museum, see Effert 2003, 228 (n. 85).

37 Haarlem, Rijksarchief Noord-Holland, Archief 476 (Rijksmuseum) nr. 1020: *Concept-inventaris van voorwerpen uit het Koninklijk Kabinet van Zeldzaamheden, die in de inventaris van het Nederlandsch Museum van Geschiedenis en Kunst zijn opgenomen*.

38 RMA, no. 1976: *Stukken betreffende Verdeling der stukken van het Koninklijk Kabinet tussen het Ethnografisch Museum en het Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst*, 1885-1886. See also Effert 2003, 212-223, and Lunsingh Scheurleer 1956.

39 RMA, no. 1076 (letter by L. Serrurier, Leiden, 4 Oct. 1887 and draft response by D. van der Kellen Jr., w.d.), and no. 1120 (*Inventaris van Kunstvoorwerpen, afkomstig uit het Koninklijk Kabinet, die overgedragen zijn aan het Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst*, 1883-1884).



Fig. 4 Examples of 'altdeutsche' chairs, originating from the former *Brandenburgisch-Preußische-Kunstammer*, in *Vorbilder-Hefte aus dem Kgl. Kunstgewerbe-Museum*, Heft 5, *Stuehle*, 1. Lieferung, XVI-XVII Jahrhundert, Berlin 1889, Tafel 2



Fig. 5 Examples of 'altdeutsche' chairs, idem, Tafel 9

tion of 'art', thus combining the useful and the beautiful. 'Applied art' or 'industrial art' meant, art *added* to objects of industry and not as an intrinsic quality of design, as it is now. 'Added art' mostly implied 'ornament',⁴⁰ so a plain white earthenware bowl, or a simply constructed wooden chair, was not seen as 'beautiful' or 'artistic', whereas a bowl decorated with floral elements and gilt edging, or a seat decorated with woodcarving and fine upholstery had a good chance of being qualified as such.

'National' characteristics

In the new museums of applied or industrial art, the meaning of an object was now decided with reference to 'true principles of design'. They were expected to set a standard for both industrial designers and artisans and craftsmen for the various methods of applying art in their discipline. Additional guided tours and leaflets, the editing of photographs, instructive pamphlets and books of plates were seen as essential activities of really active museums. The *Vorbilder-Hefte aus dem Königlichen Kunstgewerbe-Museum* provide a good example, a portfolio edition of photographs in thirty-three issues, edited between 1888 and 1905. Apart from the glass collection, the majority of the objects reproduced were acquired after 1880, and do not therefore come from the *Brandenburg Kunstammer*.⁴¹ As for furniture, only a few *Kunstammer* pieces were thought of use, apart from (fig. 4-5) the 'Altdeutsche' chairs and cabinets, which were considered to be excellent examples (Marius Vachon added one of these in his 1883 publication on the museum).⁴² In general, the texts in the *Vorbilder-Hefte* are merely descriptive. Sometimes however, discreet evaluations were included, as in the vol-

40 Martis 1979, 105-107.

41 *Vorbilder-Hefte*, Heft 27 (1901), *Geschnittene Gläser des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, 1.

42 *Vorbilder-Hefte*, Heft 5 (1889): *Stuehle*. 1. Lieferung, XVI-XVII Jahrhundert, Tafel 9; *Vorbilder-Hefte*, Heft 17 (1895): *Moebel des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, Tafel 11; *Vorbilder-Hefte*, Heft 6 (1889): *Stuehle*. II. Lieferung, XVII-XIX Jahrhundert, Tafel 11.

ume on Italian candlesticks which declared that they should be either triangular and taper like an antique tripod, or else square, with a stem achieved by combining a vase and a baluster (fig. 6). These basic structures in a wide range of variations could be found until late in the eighteenth century, but *Den Bruch mit der alten Form fuehrt das Rococo herbei (...)*.⁴³ However only one out of this series of examples, a triangular variant stems from the *Kunstammer* (acquired in the nineteenth century).⁴⁴

Though not explicitly called *Vorbilder-Hefte*, until some years before the absorption of the Netherlands Museum of History and Art into the *Rijksmuseum*, its director Van der Kellen had published books of plates of old art objects, most of them medieval or early Renaissance. One of these, *Nederlands Oudheden*, had a similar purpose as the Berlin editions, as can be read in the subtitle: 'Images of artefacts from ancient times, of most importance to science, art, and industry'.⁴⁵

In his museum, Van der Kellen preferred a miscellaneous display to a purely systematic and didactic presentation. He devoted a series of rooms to a specific period, composed of a mix of copied decorations and reconstructions as well as authentic fragments and objects. On the other hand, the central part of the collection was presented as a series of separate precious objects, tapestries, pieces of furniture, ivories and a large amount of gold and silverware, but also Chinese porcelain and the Egyptian or Byzantine 'Hedwig glass' from the previous Royal Cabinet.⁴⁶ Display cases were provided with 'electrotypical replicas', partly made at the Reproduction Department of the South Kensington Museum. Most of the copies showed foreign specimens, the intention being to enable the public to compare examples from abroad

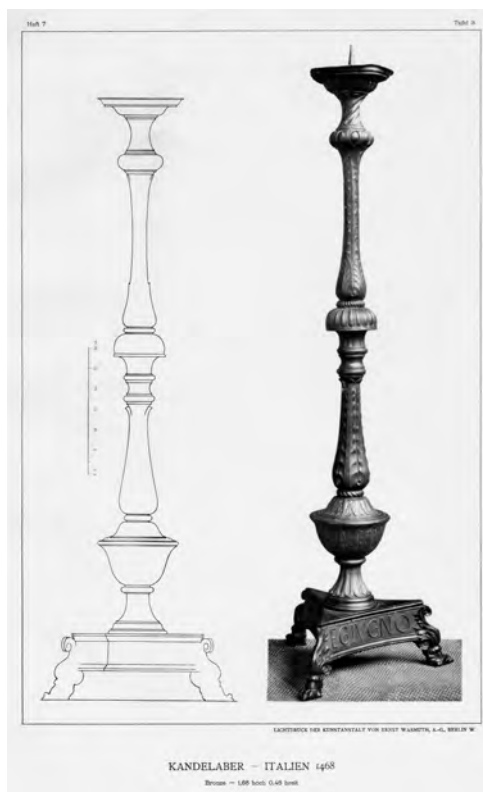


Fig. 6 Example of a candlestick (attr. Andrea del Verrocchio, c. 1480), constructed according to the 'right' principles; acquired by the Kgl. Kunstammer in 1828, in: *Vorbilder-Hefte aus dem Kgl. Kunstgewerbe-Museum*, Heft 7, *Kandelaber XVI-XVII Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1889, Tafel 3; the other half of this pair is now at the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (see note 24)

with original Dutch artefacts.⁴⁷ The educational purpose, to give information on materials and style, here becomes somewhat nationalist in spirit, as if the economics of national industry was best served by exhibiting objects expressing a national character. However, this presentation was not intended as a lesson on the cultural history of The Netherlands, as objects relating to Dutch history, also transported from the Royal Cabinet to Amsterdam, were exhibited separately in a room devoted to 'historical memorabilia'.⁴⁸

43 *Vorbilder-Hefte*, Heft 7 (1889): *Kandelaber XVI-XVII Jahrhundert*, Einleitung.

44 *Ibidem*, Tafel 3. The candlestick mentioned in note 25 is the other half of this pair.

45 Van der Kellen 1861. See also Van der Kellen 1865-1870.

46 See for the Hedwig glass, the catalogue Ritsema van Eck/ Zijlstra-Zweers 1993, 217-218.

47 Van der Kellen n.d., 37-78.

48 Van der Kellen n.d., 117.

The 1907 catalogue of furniture in the Netherlands Museum still shows Van der Kellen's twofold orientation. However the quantity of furniture once belonging to the Royal Cabinet or the Netherlands Museum at The Hague is very limited, most of it having been obtained in the post-Cabinet years. One of the few exceptions was a cabinet from Augsburg, dated 1650, donated by King William I.⁴⁹ The introduction to the 1907 catalogue is mainly informative about materials and techniques, although in some explanatory texts about particular pieces an attempt is made to define the essence of Dutch furniture. According to the catalogue, during the short period of the last quarter of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, the national product stood out as superior to those of neighbouring countries,

Dutch furniture makers learn to break away from ornament and to manufacture something outstanding without any decoration, apart from profiling (...). The Dutch sense of austerity and rational commonsense prevailed (...).⁵⁰

Due to an excess of prosperity, it was said, decline set in after 1665.⁵¹ Consequently, objects of later date were hardly represented in the museum. In the museum guide only two rooms out of twenty seven are mentioned as containing decorations and objects dating from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It was only with the twentieth century that eighteenth-century objects were acquired for the museum.⁵² The Netherlands Museum was not alone in this, as in the 1880s the Berlin *Kunstgewerbemuseum* only had a single rococo-room, characterized in the museum's guide as

unter französischem Einfluss, (...) mit allen architectonischen Formen spielende Willkür, with all symmetrical arrangement being excluded and every straight line banished. The room was however referred to with the positive adjective *anmutig*.⁵³ In nineteenth-century industrial museums in Northern Europe, late baroque and rococo art were underrepresented, both in the 'modern' South Kensington-inspired institutions as well as in the 'antiquarian' Cluny-style ones, where late medieval art and the national version of Early Renaissance were predominant.

This stylistic preference had its political and moral background. Baroque and rococo styles could be considered as belonging to the *ancien régime* of international aristocracy, a decrepit feudal civilisation that had been overcome by a modern, civic social order. Baroque exuberance, and licentious, elegant rococo ornament was associated with extravagance, effeminacy and weakness. By contrast, 'national' Early Renaissance stood for contemporary bourgeois society, solid and imbued with an entrepreneurial spirit.

At the same time, contemporary international competition was at stake. In France, starting with the Restoration and stimulated by government measures, the traditional art industry revived. More especially, the French neo-rococo products for interior furnishing, both stately and comfortable, found ready buyers among the bourgeoisie in other countries, in spite of the campaigns against this 'parvenu bad taste'.⁵⁴ The system of institutions of art and design education, museums included, was entirely dominated by capitalist international competition. France, with its long tradition in the luxury goods industry, was considered to be the most fearsome rival. French taste had to be countered.

As a Frenchman, Marius Vachon was pain-

49 This 'Augsburg cabinet' is treated extensively in: Catalogus 1952, no. 531. See also Baarsen 2000, 10-15.

50 Vogelsang 1907, LXXXIII.

51 Ibidem.

52 Van der Kellen n.d., 116-121; De Stuers 1887, 6-7. This concerns rooms no. 152 (with 'historical memorabilia', i.e. garments of deceased members of the Orange family, and eighteenth-century gold leather upholstery), 152A (the 'Chinese room' originating from the palace of the Frisian Stadholders at Leeuwarden) and 153 (wood paneling and decorative paintings). See for the 'Chinese room', De Haan 2009.

53 Kunstgewerbe-Museum 1881/1981, 36; Führer 1889, 39-40; Führer 1891, 39-40.

54 See Walton 1992.

fully aware of this competition. His admiration for Germany's promotion of its industries was mixed with fear. In all the countries he visited on his tour of inspection in the 1880's, including Denmark,⁵⁵ Hungary and Russia,⁵⁶ he was most alarmed by the growth in German exports of industrial products. Even France itself was importing increasing quantities of German ceramics, glass, crystal and other luxury goods, the field in which it had until recently been the market leader.⁵⁷

Moreover, the French defeat in the French-Prussian war haunted his memory. As a note of warning, he quoted the Prussian prince royal, who, at the inauguration of the new building of the *Kunstgewerbemuseum* in 1881, had stated that the 1870 military victory over the French was to be followed by an industrial and commercial victory.⁵⁸ Vachon himself also made use of the rhetoric of war, speaking of an industrial 'struggle' or 'war' (*guerre industrielle*)⁵⁹, and stressing that France urgently needed to set up a 'national line of defence'.⁶⁰ In Germany, museums of industry and art were a formidable resource in that struggle; they were thought of as arsenals providing artists and industrial enterprisers with their weapons.⁶¹

And what was Vachon's opinion of the Netherlands Museum of History and Art he visited in the new *Rijksmuseum* building in Amsterdam in 1888? Surprisingly he approved of it; even if it was also *une sorte de Cluny*, the display was tasteful and sophisticated. However he considered that the proposed Oriental Museum in the still unoccupied wing of the new building was likely to be even better. At the time of Vachon's visit, the directors of the Netherlands Museum and the National Ethnographic Museum were still in dispute over some objects, but Vachon rubbed his hands in anticipation:

(...) it will include collections of Oriental art, bronzes, laquery, faïence, porcelain, ivory, textiles from China, Japan, Persia and India. Most of these collections originate from the cabinet of the former Stadholder William. It is said they contain really wonderful pieces of art (*de véritables merveilles d'art*) (...).⁶²

In spite of this reported re-evaluation of the old cabinet, the Oriental Museum was not realized and for the time being the objects remained in the stockrooms. The original concept in which the objects had been conceived of as embedded particles in a continuous universe, had given way to the idea of progress in history, and the global scope of this concept had in turn given way to the ideology of national character. Finally, the admiration of rare things had been displaced by the dominance of the profit motive. In their now meaningless state of storage, they confirmed the myth of stagnation and death in out-dated lumber-room collections.

55 Vachon 1888b, 6.

56 Vachon 1885, 43, 47.

57 Vachon 1882, 30-31; Vachon 1899, 189-190.

58 Vachon 1882, 31.

59 Vachon 1886, 105.

60 Vachon 1886, 110; Vachon 1890, 244.

61 Vachon 1899, 223.

62 Vachon 1888a, 109-114.